

Hilgrif looked at his datapad in slight curiosity at the mission alert and saw he was to scout the planet from the ground to see if anything was worth picking up for Naga Sadow. He was also ordered to work with a member of Plagueis as to show willingness to work with other clans in the Dark Brotherhood. Hilgrif tapped his comm then said in a calm voice, "Shroud, prepare my ship. We will be going for a landing on the planet in an hour." Hilgrif then turned off the comm and double checked his equipment then went to his ship. After boarding his ship, Hilgrif said in a monotone voice to his droid, "Shroud, give these coordinates to the pilot. Then I want you to stay in the ship and I'll call if we need anything." Shroud gave a quick reply, "yes, sir," then went to talk to the pilot droid.

Khryso Mallus rode the shuttle down to the planet's surface with little more than a grimace on his face. He wasn't really looking forward to being forced to work with a member of Clan Naga Sadow on such short notice, but there wasn't much he could do about it. He had barely begun to get to know the members of his own clan, and would much prefer to work within the ranks of his people. He didn't really have the time to brood, unfortunately, as the pilot of the shuttle signalled that they would be touching down in a matter of minutes.

Khryso paused for a moment to make sure he had all of his gear and weapons. He wasn't yet sure what this scouting mission had in store for him and his soon to be ally, however preparedness was something that was always important. Once he confirmed that everything was in order, Khryso made his way to the boarding ramp and waited the last few seconds for the shuttle to touch down. A dozen seconds of cycles cut the air with sharp mechanical whirs before the ramp dropped into place and allowed Khryso to embark into the humid air of the forest clearing.

He didn't have much information about the person he'd be working with beyond a basic description. A Verpine, nothing too special by all accounts of what he'd been given. Whipping out his datapad, Khryso quickly reviewed the name he'd been given. Hilgrif. Glancing around for his partner of the next few hours, Khryso tentatively reached out with a gentle Force probe to see if he could locate the being nearby.

Hilgrif was studying the info that Shroud could find on his ally, Khryso Mallus, when Hilgrif received a message from Shroud over his comm. "Sir it looks like our ally has come slightly early. We are bringing the ship down for landing now." As Hilgrif felt the Favus 1 land he got up and exited the ship to greet the Chiss. After walking toward him, Hilgrif gave the standard motions for the Verpine welcome greeting. Hilgrif then said calmly, "So, on this temple that seems to have a bit of droid activity, how do you want to do this scouting mission? Any suggestions?"

The Verpine had arrived and got right down to business, which Khryso appreciated. He took the time to return the being's greeting with a tight-lipped nod before turning back to his datapad to pull up the specifics on their mission. He'd been provided with an orbital scan of the nearby

area which was overlaid on a simple map of the forest. Moving a bit closer to the alien to share the datapad, Khryso gestured with his finger towards the map as he spoke.

“According to the information I was given, the patrol route of the active droids seems to sporadically change based on almost nothing at all, so we don’t know exactly where they’ll be.” Khryso indicated the large gray circle on the map that indicated the general routes the droids have been spotted on. “Which means we don’t have a clear approach vector that will leave us fully prepared.”

Glancing up into the overcast sky, Khryso traced a line on the map straight towards the triangle that indicated the point of interest. “I don’t think we have many more better options than heading straight for the temple. Unless we had some consistent air support flying above and calling out droid locations to us as we went, anywhere is a potential ambush spot.” Khryso paused to glance at the Verpine, seeing if he could read the aliens expression.

Verpine was not a species he was particularly familiar with. He’d certainly seen a few in his lifetime, but he’d never had the opportunity to properly converse or interact with one of the insects. Usually he’d do his best to read the body language of his partner to try and sync with them as best he could, but in this case he wasn’t sure just how well he would manage. The sheer difference in body structure, let alone the difference in culture, might not work in his favor. That being said, he wouldn’t let it get in his way.

Khryso lowered the datapad for a second, now curious. Offering his hand for a shake, he forced a small, polite smile. “Acolyte Khryso Mallus, by the way. I apologize for not properly introducing myself. I do hope you’re Hilgrif, the Naga Sadow Clan member I’m supposed to be meeting with.”

Hilgrif gave a small tilt of his head, then said in a slightly puzzled voice, “Yes I am Hilgrif and yes I know who you are. Why did you not study your ally’s flaws and strengths on the ship ride to the planet? That would have been more effective and helped you not to make foolish mistakes in battle because you do not even know your own ally.” Khryso was silent, unsure exactly how to reply to that. Hilgrif just gave a small shake of his head. “Do not worry about the patrols. I will have my droid run scans from the ship to help us miss any patrols as to not alert the base.” Hilgrif then tapped his comm. “Shroud, we need scans of the local area and the targeted location. Keep me informed of any patrols through my datapad. Oh, and keep a look out for any lone droids. I would like to look through their minds and maybe have it join the hive.”

“It shall be done, sir,” came Shroud’s quick reply.

Hilgrif then turned to the Chiss and said, “Now we shall be good; unless we make too much noise.” Hilgrif then turned around and started walking to the location needed when he paused for a second. “Would you like my hive to update your datapad, also?”

Khryso responded stoically with a nod, handing his datapad to Hilgrif. Hilgrif resumed walking and typed a few quick commands on it then tossed it back to the Chiss. "Try to be more effective on this mission than what your file says."

Khryso caught his datapad as it was tossed back to him and glanced down at the screen to confirm that he was connected to whatever comm channel the Verpine and his droid were using. Rather than engage with the Verpine, which he was sorely tempted to do, Khryso decided to refocus on the mission at hand. He quietly reminded himself as they began moving that the cultural barrier between them was likely responsible for whatever friction they may be having. Although he certainly didn't appreciate all the implications Hilgrif was making, bringing that up would only result in a conflict when he had a mission to do. He would have to prove through his actions that the bug was wrong to make such snap judgements.

They moved silently through the forest at first, only interrupted when the cacophony of wildlife noises reached a fever pitch or the slight hum of engines when Hilgrif's ship passed them by overhead. It wasn't long before they passed into the gray circle on the map, indicating that they could start running into some of the rogue droids any time now. As if on cue, an alert appeared on their datapads as a droid patrol was spotted nearby. Just one simple B-1 battle droid, apparently.

Not wanting to give the Hilgrif the impression that the Verpine was somehow in charge of this mission, Khryso carefully drew his BlasTech LL-30 pistol and moved towards the location that had been indicated on the map. He did give a cursory glance towards his companion as he moved, however, only to see that while the bug was moving in the same direction, he had drawn his Ion pistol.

Only a dozen meters east and the droid came into view, slowly meandering through the trees with a rusty old blaster rifle raised and at the ready. Raising his pistol into firing position, Khryso dropped to a knee and took aim at the target. He wasn't quite a crack shot yet, but he figured he should be able to handle it without much issue. However, before he had confidently lined up his own shot, Hilgrif let loose an ion blast that narrowly missed the droid, quickly followed by a second that nailed it square in the chest, dropping the mechanical being before it had much chance to respond. Khryso sighed, holstering his pistol and following Hilgrif towards the droid as the Verpine moved closer to investigate it.

Hilgrif took out his tools and hooked up his datapad to the droid's memory to see if he could find any clues on the base. He then gave a shake of his equipment, as it would take too long to break into. Hilgrif just took the time to extract the memory and put it in one of his pouches, then got up and asked the Chiss, "are we still in the clear?"

Khryso said in a quick voice, "yes." Hilgrif gave a small nod and took a mental note to inform Shroud later his plan to get the Chiss to be even more effective than what the file said is

working excellent. Hilgrif then let Khryso lead the way while glancing at the pad to make sure they did not run into too many droids.

Then Hilgrif saw they would be going into a clearing where the temple should be at. Hilgrif sent a quick telepathic message to the Chiss. *Do not rush into the clearing. Look for any thing that might spot us. I'll keep an eye on the patrols.* Hilgrif looked at what should be the temple from the ship scans.

It looks to be on the small side and made of stone but under the stone seems to be a metal layer. The square top of the temple was covered in foliage and vines that crept across it, leaving a pattern similar to a vascular system spread over a holocron. Of course, like most Sith temples, towards the bottom it widened out, giving it an appearance not unlike that of a segmented pyramid. Unlike the top, however, the lower half of the structure was free of the encroaching flora and around the door specifically was oddly clean and clear of obstruction. Said door was barely hanging on, stuck halfway through retracting into the smooth stone surface and blasted so badly it had become black and curled.

Khryso surveyed the building from their spot in the treeline, carefully inspecting the walls of the temple to ensure that there were no hidden cameras or turrets that might activate once they entered the clearing surrounding the temple. His right hand was resting on the butt of his blaster while his left held his datapad out in front of him, keeping an eye on the map. Every minute that passed he was tempted to retort the Verpine's apparent condescension, but he needed to focus on the mission. He didn't trust Hilgrif completely already, and he could only imagine how much worse things might get if they got into a tense disagreement. That being said, he had full intentions of giving the bug a piece of his mind once they made it back to the landing zone.

From what he could tell, there wasn't much security directly outside the temple, but this was a Sith temple. It couldn't be that easy. So, Khryso closed his eyes, looking inward and drawing completely on the Force to reach out and probe the temple for any sign of hostility. Surprisingly, it felt dormant, like it was in some sort of coma. There was energy coming from it, but it wasn't dark or sinister like most Dark Side energy. It was a low hum without any kind of emotion. This was a strong indication that there was a fair amount of electronics hidden within the Temple. Although he had yet to form any kind of camaraderie with Hilgrif, the Force was apparently at work, gifting him with a technician for this mission.

Once he was confident there was no danger in the clearing immediately surrounding the temple, Khryso glanced at Hilgrif. "Let's move in." His right hand switched from his holstered pistol to his lightsaber, wrapping around the familiar hilt and pulling it from where it was clipped onto his belt. He wasn't sure what they would find inside the temple, but he didn't intend to go in without being prepared.

Stepping out of the treeline, his lightsaber raised into ready position but not yet activated, Khryso carefully surveyed his surroundings as he moved forward. Once Khryso had made several paces into the clearing without the temple reacting in any way, Hilgrif decided to follow the Chiss, readying his own weapon as they neared the entrance to the temple. The door, although clearly blasted apart by blasters, no longer smoked or smelled of melted metal. It had been this way for a decent amount of time. The base assumption to make would be that the patrolling droids had blasted their way out years ago and now wandered aimlessly, but this was a Sith Temple. It couldn't be quite that simple. What were these droids doing inside a Sith Temple in the first place? Khryso would continue to wonder and perhaps even theorize, but as the two Brotherhood members passed over the threshold of the temple, he knew now wasn't the time for getting lost in thought. He needed to be ready for whatever came next.

Surprisingly, what came next was a rather large chamber that seemed to take up most, if not all, of the temple's interior. Along the walls were rows and rows of powered-down droids, almost entirely B-1 battle droids. A few spots in the line-up were empty, clear indicators of those that were now out on patrol, but otherwise they were quiet.

Hilgrif looked at the droids in fascination and slight sadness. These droids were still doing their mission even with the CIS long-gone. This long, the droids still loyal without a fault. If only the droids had a better master, they would not look like this. Hilgrif shook his head to snap out of these thoughts. He could help these poor droids a later time. Hilgrif then looked to study the room, but from what he could tell these droids were part of an assault force and whatever was in here was taken many years ago. Now it's just a vacant shell. Hilgrif looked at his datapad and saw the number of droids still left, then turned and sent a telepathic message to Khryso. *Let's leave. The item our leaders want is not here. Let's leave these droids alone, we would only get ourselves killed trying to help them all. Nod if you understand and agree.*

The Chiss paused and seemed to be thinking. Hilgrif then sent a second message. *Would you like to double check, just in case?* The Chiss just hesitated then walked out. Hilgrif followed suit then retraced a path on the map to get him near the droid they'd disabled so he could take it to his hive. On the way back to the ship, Hilgrif picked up the droid and noticed that the Chiss seemed very distracted with something, like he was planning something. Hilgrif sent a silent message to Shroud. "Be prepared, we might have a fight with our 'ally' when we get back. It looks like he's planning trouble."

As they neared the landing zone, Khryso signalled his shuttle with his datapad, letting them know he would be arriving for pickup soon, after which he stashed away his datapad. Giving the Verpine that walked with a sidelong glance, Khryso decided that now was probably the best time to talk to him. Khryso stopped walking and turned to Hilgrif, clearing his throat in a bid to get the bug's attention.

Hilgrif noted Khryso's sudden stop and did so himself, although it was quite clear he was intentionally leaving a few meters between them. Clearly the Verpine had sensed something

was up. Khryso fixed a neutral expression onto his face. "Listen, you seem plenty capable and you're higher ranking than me. However, that doesn't mean you have the right to talk down to me. I really don't appreciate your condescension and you're not giving off the best impression of your clan."

Hilgrif remained still, as if waiting for more, but Khryso simply released a curt sigh. Hilgrif replied, "Do not worry, most people are inefficient compared to droids. My second in the hive gave me a suggestion that showing all your defects would help you improve; to be more efficient."

Khryso narrowed his eyes. "Next time, I'll be the one calling *you* inefficient." In terms of comebacks, Khryso immediately recognized how lame it was, but he was satisfied that he had aired his grievances and subconsciously reached up to adjust his collar before turning to march back to the landing zone. Hilgrif carefully followed suit, falling into step behind him.

They soon arrived at the landing zone and, on cue, Khryso's shuttle was descending to take him back to Plagueis' base of operations. He turned to Hilgrif. Despite whatever differences they may have had, he still intended to do his best to part on good terms. He gave the Verpine a slight nod of his head. "Farewell, Hilgrif." He left it at that and turned to await his shuttle's landing.

Hilgrif looked at the Chiss, then sent a silent command to Shroud. "Keep an eye on this one. He might become a good ally of the hive in time." Hilgrif then turned off the comm and sent a quick message to Khryso's datapad with his list of mistakes and what he did well. At the end he added: "To help your goal at becoming more efficient than me."

*What Hilgrif wrote is noted in this color.

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